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Lucas, Edward Verrall

The debt [Poem]

London

[1915?]

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no 2

THE DEBT

BY

E. V LUCAS

METHUEN & CO. LTD. LONDON

PRICE ONE PENNY

THE DEBT

No more old England will they see—
Those men who've died for you and me.

So lone and cold they lie; but we,
We still have life; we still may greet
Our pleasant friends in home and street;
We still have life, are able still
To climb the turf of Bignor Hill,
To see the placid sheep go by,
To hear the sheep-dog's eager cry,
To feel the sun, to taste the rain,
To smell the Autumn scents again
Beneath the brown and gold and red
Which old October's brush has spread,
To hear the robin in the lane,
To look upon the English sky.

So young they were, so strong and well,
Until the bitter summons fell—
Too young to die.
Yet there on foreign soil they lie,
So pitiful, with glassy eye
And limbs all tumbled anyhow:
Quite finished, now.

On every heart, lest we forget—
Secure at home—engrave this debt!

Too delicate is flesh to be
The shield that nations interpose
Twixt red Ambition and his foes—
The bastion of Liberty.
So beautiful their bodies were,
Built with so exquisite a care:
So young and fit and lithe and fair.
The very flower of us were they,
The very flower, but yesterday!
Yet now so pitiful they lie,
Where love of country bade them hie
To fight this fierce Caprice—and die.
All mangled now, where shells have burst
And lead and steel have done their worst;
The tender tissues ploughed away,
The year's slow processes effaced:
The Mother of us all—disgraced.

And some leave wives behind, young wives;
Already some have launched new lives:
little daughter, little son—
For thus this blundering world goes on.
But never more will any see
The old secure felicity,
The kindnesses that made us glad
Before the world went mad.
They'll never hear another bird,
Another gay or loving word—
Those men who lie so cold and lone,
Far in a country not their own;
Those men who died for you and me,
That England still might sheltered be
And all our lives go on the same
(Although to live is almost shame).

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